



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

➤GENERAL NOTES.◀

Letters and Posts of the Ancients.—There is reference in the Book of Esther to the first postal service worthy of the name concerning which we have any definite knowledge. (See I., 22; III., 13, 15; VIII., 10, 14; Rollin's *Anc. Hist.*, Bk. 4, chap. 4, art. 1, sec. 4.) Jeremiah (LI., 31) refers to some such system among the Assyrians, and it is likely that from the earliest ages kings and men of power made provision for the rapid conveyance of their messages.

In Palestine and other mountainous countries this was done by fleet footmen. Some rulers provided themselves with a corps of those who were qualified by nature and practice to become such messengers. Pliny (as quoted in Dunglison's *Physiology*, Vol. II., p. 249) says that excision of the spleen was performed on runners as beneficial to their wind.

There is record of those who traveled on foot from Tyre to Jerusalem, one hundred miles, in twenty-four hours; and we read that some could accomplish so much as one hundred and fifty miles during the same period of time. (Barnes on Job IX., 25.) These professional footmen were well known in the time of Job, whose language is: "Are not my days swifter than a post (lit. *runner*)?" Saul, the first Hebrew king, had an organized body of "footmen" (margin, as original, *runners*), in which respect he doubtless followed the usual custom of kings. Under our English reading "guard" we find these runners to have been a regular corps in the armies of succeeding Hebrew monarchs. Hence the allusion of Jeremiah: "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses?"

Among nations richer in swift beasts, and dwelling in a less mountainous country than the Jews, the runner, doubtless from earliest times, ran with other legs than his own. But the only word used in the Bible for such couriers, whether mounted or not, is the one of which we have spoken, and which is often translated "posts." This latter English term, coming from the Latin, originally meant the house or station whence relays of horses were obtained, and where couriers might lodge. Such an original meaning of the word is almost lost to us, though remaining in the expression "military post."

The Persian postal system was established by Cyrus the Great during a reign continuing from 559. to 529 B. C. It was greatly improved by Darius, to whom some even ascribe its origination. (Rawlinson, *Anc. Mon.*, Vol. III., p. 426.) Herodotus (VIII., 98) gives the credit to Xerxes. This latter monarch in the earlier years of his reign devoted himself to the thorough organization and the general improvement of his realm. He perceived that the peace and permanency of his rule would be greatly enhanced by quick communication between himself and all parts of his vast empire, that he might thus have prompt and frequent reports from every officer of his government, and be able speedily to transmit his own directions and decrees. Thus only he could have "well in hand" an empire of twenty satrapies and one hundred and twenty-seven districts, extending from India to Ethiopia.

Accordingly, he established post-houses along the chief lines of travel at intervals of about fourteen miles, according to the average capacity of a horse to gallop at his best speed without stopping. At each of these there were maintained by state a number of couriers and several relays of horses. One of these horsemen receiving an official document rode at utmost speed to the next post-house, whence it was taken onward by another horse, and perhaps by a new courier. Ballantine states that at the present day a good horseman of that country will often travel one hundred and twenty miles or more each day for ten or twelve days consecutively.

Such was the method of transmitting messages existing in the time of Xerxes and Esther, and in our day still employed by the government of Persia, and, under substantially the same form, in thinly settled regions of Russia, and other countries. This system was adopted with some improvements by the Greeks and Romans, and transmitted to the nations of western Europe, with whom in the course of centuries it developed into the inexpressibly useful form in which it has been enjoyed by us.

But in ancient times the postal system was intended only for the monarch and those "whom he delighted to honor," and not for his people, who derived no direct benefit from it. It is true that good roads, bridges, ferries, and inns were established; that by guard-houses these routes were kept free from brigands which infested the empire (Herod. v., 52); and that travelers might journey upon these highways; but it does not appear that they could obtain the use of the post-horses, even when the government was in no need of them. And above all, the post itself was only for the king. It soon became a law of the system that a courier might impress man or beast into his service, and it was regarded a serious offence to resist such impressment. This privilege of couriers was subsequently, as is well known, a part of the Roman system, reference to which is found in the familiar instruction of our Savior, "Whosoever shall *compel* thee to go a mile, go with him twain" (Matt. v., 41; xxvii., 32; Mark xv., 21). The messages of the king were thus "hastened and pressed on" at any inconvenience to the people; but common men must send their letters by caravans, by special messengers, or in any way they might.

The main post-road in Xerxes' day was that from Susa to Sardis, a distance of about fourteen hundred miles (Herod., *ibid.*). Besides, there was a branch to Ecbatana, and a main line to Babylon, with less important routes to all the localities of the empire.—*Rev. Wm. P. Alcott in the Lowell Hebrew Club's Book of Esther.*

The Prophetic Order.—The Egyptian hierarchy, the paternal despotism of China, were very fit instruments for carrying those nations up to the point of civilization which they attained. But having reached that point they were brought to a permanent halt for want of mental liberty and individuality,—requisites of improvement which the institutions that had carried them thus far entirely incapacitated them from acquiring; and as the institutions did not break down and give place to others, further improvement stopped. In contrast with these nations, let us consider the example of an opposite character, afforded by another and a comparatively insignificant Oriental people—the Jews. They, too, had an absolute monarchy and a hierarchy. These did for them what was done for other Oriental races by their institutions—subdued them to industry and order, and gave